

Coatesville man sentenced to life behind bars at age 22

by Michael Rellahan
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WEST CHESTER >> Demetrius Montis Joseph has spent every waking day since Oct. 4, 2015 behind bars at Chester County Prison. Unless there is some sort of appellate miracle, he can now expect to spend the remaining days of his life in similar circumstances.

Judge Patrick Carmody on Wednesday sentenced Joseph to life in prison for his conviction on second-degree murder charges in the shooting death during the botched robbery of a Mexican immigrant living in the city.

The judge, who reminded those family members and supporters who came to see Joseph during the brief proceeding that he had no discretion in the sentence, nevertheless agreed with the two sides in the case that it was a tragedy for all involved.

Had Joseph, 22, of Coatesville not helped plan the robbery, or had he opted to agree to plead guilty to reduced charges like three of his co-defendants, he would not be staring at the longest sentence possible.

"Instead of looking at a parole when you are 30 or 40 years old, you're looking at a life sentence," said Carmody. "And life means life in Pennsylvania."

According to the authorities' description of the events surrounding the Oct. 4, 2015, shooting, Joseph and four others conspired to rob a group of four men who were sitting outside a home on North Fourth Avenue in Coatesville. Barraza said Joseph, Steven Adams, and Gaylynn Mansfield were on North Fifth Avenue between 1:30 a.m. and 2 a.m. near the Coatesville Public Library when they were approached by Adams' brother, Tyler Adams, and his friend Damon Rowe.

The five all began walking north on Fourth Avenue when Joseph allegedly suggested that they "do a lick," meaning rob someone. As they walked north of Fleetwood Avenue, they saw the men sitting on a porch outside a house in the 100 block. They walked to the end of the block, and agreed among themselves to turn around and rob the men.

They chose the men, said Deputy District Attorney Carlos Barraza, who led the prosecution, because they appeared to be Mexican immigrants who likely had cash on them from their work as day laborers, and who would be unlikely to go to police with information about their robbery because of their assumed illegal status.

Tyler Adams allegedly gave the handgun and a mask he had with him to Rowe, who put on the mask so that he would not be recognized by the men, some of whom could recognize him, he told the others. When they reached the porch, Mansfield punched one of the men while Rowe drew the handgun and pointed it at Jiminez-Ramos, who stood up to try to calm the situation. Rowe then fired a shot that struck Ramos in the chest, Barraza said.

He then turned the weapon on another of the men, Juan Antonio Sanchez-Gutierrez and shot him in the leg.

After the shots were fired, the five all ran from the scene. They were arrested later, with police finding the murder weapon in Rowe's bedroom. Jiminez-Ramos died at Brandywine Hospital around 2:45 a.m. that morning.

Rowe was found not guilty of all charges at the trial he and Joseph shared in November. The Adamases and Mansfield all pleaded guilty to lesser charges.

“The commonwealth takes no joy in sentencing anyone to a long period of time,” said Barraza at the proceeding. “We gave Mr. Joseph every opportunity not to be here” by extending plea offers to him if he accepted responsibility. But Joseph decided to risk a trial, and lost.

Barraza noted that as tragic the case may be for Joseph, it was fatefully worse for the victim.

“It’s a shame, your honor,” he told Carmody. “Four young men are losing large portions of their lives. But (Jimenez-Ramos) didn’t have to lose his life. This could have been avoided.”

Defense attorney Stuart Crichton of West Chester, who represented Joseph at trial, said he would pursue an appeal. “We’re not giving up the fight” he said. He had contended that Joseph was not at the scene the night of the shooting, but the jury heard telephone conversations Joseph had in prison that greatly implicated him in the crime.

Joseph did not address the case before Carmody, saying only that he loved his family.

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